United Nations A/54/180

General Assembly

Distr.: General
27 July 1999

Original: English

Fifty-fourth session
Item 26 of the provisional agenda*
Cooperation between the United Nations and the League of Arab States

Cooperation between the United Nations and the League of Arab States

Report of the Secretary-General

Contents

		Paragraphs	Page
I.	Introduction	1	3
II.	Consultations and exchanges of information	2–4	3
III.	Follow-up action on proposals agreed to at general meetings between organizations of the United Nations system and the League of Arab States	5–38	3
	A. United Nations Secretariat	6–9	3
	1. Department of Public Information	6–7	3
	2. Department of Economic and Social Affairs	8–9	3
	B. United Nations Centre for Human Settlements	10	4
	C. United Nations Conference on Trade and Development	11–14	4
	D. United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East	15–16	4
	E. United Nations Population Fund	17–21	5
	F. United Nations International Drug Control Programme: Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention	22	6

* A/54/150

99-22142 (E) 130899

G.	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization	23–25	6
H.	International Civil Aviation Organization	26	6
I.	World Health Organization	27–29	6
J.	World Bank	30	7
K.	Universal Postal Union	31–32	7
L.	International Telecommunication Union	33	7
M.	United Nations Industrial Development Organization	34–36	7
N.	International Atomic Energy Agency	37–38	8
IV.	General meeting on cooperation between organizations of the United Nations system and the League of Arab States	39–53	8

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to paragraph 13 of General Assembly resolution 53/8 of 22 October 1998.

II. Consultations and exchanges of information

2. During the period under review, the secretariats of the United Nations and the League of Arab States (LAS), as well as the Office of the Permanent Observer for the League of Arab States to the United Nations, continued to maintain close contact on matters of mutual concern to the two organizations.

3. On 10 and 11 December 1998, a meeting on cooperation between the United Nations and regional organizations was convened by Kieran Prendergast, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs. The meeting was a follow-up to the third high-level meeting on cooperation between the United Nations and regional organizations convened by the Secretary-General on 28 and 29 July 1998 on the theme of "Cooperation for conflict prevention". Dr. Hussein Hassouna, Permanent Observer, represented the League of Arab States. The meeting reviewed recommendations of the third high-level meeting, developed practical modalities for cooperation in the field of early warning and conflict prevention and exchanged views on the implementation and follow-up process.

4. High-level contacts between the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and the League of Arab States included a meeting between the Commissioner-General and the Permanent Observer of the League of Arab States to the United Nations in New York, in November 1998. In March 1999, the Director-General of the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) paid an official visit to the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States and the League offered the UNIDO representative in Cairo observer status at its meetings.

III. Follow-up action on proposals agreed to at general meetings between organizations of the United Nations system and the League of Arab States

5. A summary of the reports of the organizations and agencies of the United Nations system on their cooperation with the League of Arab States during the period under review is given below. It represents the follow-up action on proposals adopted at the meetings held between the United Nations and the League of Arab States at Vienna in 1995 (A/50/496) and Geneva in 1997 (A/52/378).

A. United Nations Secretariat

1. Department of Public Information

6. Programmes produced by the Radio and Central News Service covered the following topics: the status of the Middle East peace process, the situations in Iraq and Somalia and the Lockerbie case — including a statement issued by the League of Arab States welcoming the transfer of the two Libyan suspects in the bombing of Pan Am flight 103. It also conducted an interview with Esmat Abdel Maguid, Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, which was broadcast in Egypt, Palestine, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates and was also published in three Arabic international dailies. The United Nations Information Centre in Beirut, in cooperation with the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, LAS and the United Nations Development Fund for Women, arranged several interviews during a regional meeting on follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women. The information centres in Moscow, Cairo, Harare and Lagos organized seminars and other events to commemorate the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

7. The Dag Hammarskjöld Library has intensified cooperation with the Documentation and Information Centre of the League of Arab States in Cairo, ensuring that the Centre regularly receives United Nations materials.

2. Department of Economic and Social Affairs

8. A project, started up by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs in 1987, on the administrative development of the General Secretariat of the League of Arab States, funded by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) with in-kind contributions from the

League and a total budget of $2.5 million, was completed. The objective of the project was to strengthen the administration of the General Secretariat and to modernize its work procedures to increase its effectiveness, efficiency and responsiveness to the objectives set forth in its charter.

9. The Department also carries out research and analysis in the area of population that is of substantive use to the work of the League. In addition to making reports and analyses available in hard copy, the League benefits from the Department's research findings via its electronic Web site (www.undp.org/popin).

B. United Nations Centre for Human Settlements

10. Through its Regional Information Office for Arab States, the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements participates as an observer in the ministerial sessions of the League. The League and the Centre have jointly organized regional conferences within the framework of implementing the Habitat Agenda. Jointly organized meetings include two in Cairo and one in Amman to draw a regional Arab strategy for the implementation of Habitat Agenda at the local, national and regional levels. The Strategy was adopted by the Council of Arab Ministers for Housing and Reconstruction at its last meeting.

C. United Nations Conference on Trade and Development

11. From 1998 to 1999, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) secretariat intensified its cooperation with the secretariat of LAS, as well as with its different member countries. This cooperation mainly focused on technical assistance activities. During the period under review, regular consultations between UNCTAD and the LAS secretariat took place. In November 1998, at the request of UNDP and the League, the UNCTAD secretariat participated in a joint mission to LAS headquarters in Cairo and identified two main priorities, one dealing with assistance for the establishment of the "Pan-Arab free trade area" and the other dealing with "Customs modernization and cooperation measures". The two proposals, submitted for funding to the UNDP Regional Bureau for Arab States, are still under consideration. UNCTAD has been designated to execute them in 1999.

12. Furthermore, the LAS secretariat has participated in various UNCTAD/UNDP seminars/workshops for Arab countries, including conferences on electronic commerce, trade and environment and competition policy, a symposium for Arab countries preparing them for the second World Trade Organization (WTO) Ministerial Conference meeting of Arab experts on WTO issues, the first seminar on investment for Arab countries and a brainstorming meeting for Arab countries acceding to the World Trade Organization. In addition, UNCTAD was associated in the preparation and organization of the Organization of African Unity (OAU)/LAS second Afro-Arab Business Week, held in Burkina Faso in October and November 1998, and the fourth Afro-Arab Trade Fair, held in Senegal in April 1999. Regular meetings took place between the delegation of LAS in Geneva and various substantive divisions of UNCTAD to study ways and means of intensifying this cooperation. It is expected that this cooperation will be reinforced shortly, provided that the necessary resources are available.

13. In the past year, UNCTAD's Debt Management and Financial Analysis System (DMFAS) has made the following contributions to activities organized by the Arab Monetary Fund: on 21 and 22 February 1998, two lectures on "The impact of changes of the terms of trade and volumes on the trade balance" were given to a course on "Policies and management of the external sector" in Abu Dhabi. From 28 to 31 March 1998, presentations on "Effective debt management" and on DMFAS were made to a workshop on "Policies and management of public debt" in Abu Dhabi. Two DMFAS projects were also signed last year, one with Jordan and the other with Yemen.

14. In order to enhance the capacity of the LAS secretariat and its member States, an agreement is under preparation between LAS and UNCTAD providing that the two organizations would, within their respective mandates, conceptualize, develop and implement programmes of technical cooperation in the areas of trade facilitation, including customs modernization of intra-Arab, regional and international trade.

D. United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East

15. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), which directly provides essential education, health care, relief assistance and social services to 3.6 million registered Palestine refugees, has long enjoyed a close cooperative relationship with the League of Arab States. The Agency maintains contact with the secretariat in Cairo and with the Permanent Observer of the League of Arab States in New

York, participates in regular sectoral meetings organized by the League and seeks to foster cooperation between its officials and the LAS secretariat at various levels and in various fora. In the education sector, the eighth annual joint meeting between UNRWA and the LAS Council of Educational Affairs for the Children of Palestine was held in Cairo in December 1998 to review education services offered to Palestine refugees in the host countries and issues facing the UNRWA education programme.

16. UNRWA continued to benefit from the generous financial support of LAS and its continuing efforts to urge donors to increase voluntary contributions to the Agency. In 1998, member States of LAS contributed US$ 4.8 million in cash and in-kind to the Agency's regular budget and extrabudgetary special assistance programmes. In April 1999, the LAS Council of Ministers reaffirmed its resolution 4645 of 6 April 1987, which called on its member States to increase their contributions to the 1981 level of 7.73 per cent of the Agency's regular budget. UNRWA's critical financial situation and the role of the Agency were the subject of considerable discussion at LAS meetings during the period under review. The League reiterated its support for the Agency's humanitarian activities, concern over the repeated funding shortfalls faced by the Agency and their implications for Palestine refugees and the host authorities and the importance of increased contributions to the Agency by the international community.

E. United Nations Population Fund

17. LAS and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) efficiently cooperated in the context of the preparation for the International Conference on Population and Development plus Five review of the progress made towards achievement of the goals of the conference. In concert with the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, UNFPA and LAS participated in the preparation and conduct of the Arab Conference on the Implementation of the Programme of Action, held in Beirut from 22 to 25 September 1998. The conference was designed to conduct a review and evaluate the achievements of the Arab States in terms of implementation of the second Amman Declaration on Population and Development and to highlight the constraints faced in this connection, as well as to formulating a number of recommendations regarding future steps to be pursued in furtherance of the implementation process. Accordingly, a high-level meeting was held to discuss several topics of relevance to the Arab region. UNFPA and LAS also continued their cooperation in the area of data collection and analysis.

18. UNFPA support to LAS and its Population Research Unit has facilitated efforts to reinforce and consolidate the commitment of member States to the recommendations of the international conferences, including the International Conference on Population and Development, the Fourth World Conference on Women and the World Summit for Social Development, and to mobilize the necessary financial and human resources for the implementation of the respective national plans of action.

19. UNFPA and LAS are currently devising a joint collaboration under the forthcoming quadrennial inter-country programme of assistance.

20. As a basis for a region-wide data bank on demographic and reproductive health indicators, and under the auspices of the regional Pan Arab Project for Child Development (PAPCHILD), the results of the Morocco PAPCHILD survey were disseminated. The second and final phase of PAPCHILD began in 1993 and was co-sponsored by LAS, the Arab Gulf Programme for the United Nations Development Organization, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF), with technical input from the United Nations. With the implementation of the Morocco study, the last of 10 surveys, this regional project was able to complement the basic maternal health and family planning modules with a new approach better suited to address the concepts emerging in the aftermath of the International Conference on Population and Development. The new approach aims at collecting data on an expanded range of reproductive health aspects, including those pertaining to knowledge about and behaviour relating to sexually transmitted diseases and human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS). PAPCHILD has, and continues, to provide input to policy development and evaluation for the countries in the region. To commemorate the completion of the PAPCHILD survey programme, a technical conference was held in June 1999, attended by scientists from all over the world, who submitted various papers related to the survey that will help advance the understanding of maternal and child health issues in the Arab region.

21. The Fund also participated this year in the finalization and approval of the Pan Arab Project for Family Health (PAPFAM) survey, proposed for 5 years, starting in 1999. This survey includes the conduct of demographic and reproductive health surveys in 16 countries as well as qualitative research studies in three selected countries. The

project is a multi-agency collaborative effort, which includes bilateral agencies and the private sector. Under the umbrella of LAS, the project is expected to generate a regional database characterized by comparability and the application of standardized methodologies.

F. United Nations International Drug Control Programme: Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention

22. The Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention, continued to maintain close cooperation and effective coordination in the drug control and crime prevention fields with LAS and its specialized institutions: namely, the Council of Arab Ministers of the Interior and the Naif Arab Academy for Security Sciences. This included, in particular, reciprocal representation at the Commission on Narcotic Drugs; the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice; meetings of the Subcommission on Illicit Drug Traffic and Related Matters in the Near and Middle East; the sessions of the Ad Hoc Committee on the Elaboration of a Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and the annual meetings of the Council of Arab Ministers of the Interior (Tunis).

G. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

23. The Beirut Office of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) cooperates with the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (ALECSO) and closely associates Arab institutions and technical expertise in projects undertaken in the Arab region. The UNESCO Cairo Office also cooperates with certain specialized organizations of LAS, namely ALECSO and the Arab Centre for the Study of Arid Zones and Dry Lands (ACSAD). During the period under review a number of meetings and workshops were co-sponsored by both organizations.

24. In cooperation with ACSAD, the UNESCO Cairo Office also organized a training course on the application of geographic information systems and databanks for studying the environment and social impacts in integrated water projects.

25. In the social sciences, the UNITWIN (project for twinning universities)/UNESCO chairs programme related to interdisciplinary studies and sustainable development joined with the Association of Partially or Wholly French-Language Universities to launch a post-graduate cours sustainable agriculture in the Mediterranean in Be UNESCO recently commissioned a feasibility stud expand the diploma to 3 to 4 more Arab countries o Mediterranean, through the creation of an inter-ac network programme. The UNITWIN Network of Fo Migration, chaired by the University of Oxford, compr network partners from several Palestinian universitie Jordan and universities in Morocco. The UNITWIN bo meeting (Jerusalem, 11–12 December 1998) approv project presented by the University of Casablanca-Ainch Morocco, to set up the first UNESCO Chair within network. Network members are frequently called upo provide expertise to their Governments. In addition to t training and research activities, they also run spe courses for government officials, refugee host commu leaders and to refugees themselves.

H. International Civil Aviation Organizati

26. The International Civil Aviation Organization (IC works closely with the Arab Civil Aviation Commis (ACAC). At the request of ACAC, ICAO prepared submitted, in March 1999, two technical coopera projects: the first concentrated on the planning implementation of communication, navigation surveillance/air traffic management systems in the A world, with a total budget of approximately US$ 500,(the second dealt with the restructuring of civil avia facilities in the Arab countries, at a total estimated co US$ 370,000. Both projects are presently under revie ACAC for funding and implementation. Members of were invited to the ICAO Statistics Workshop (Cairo August–2 September 1998). Moreover, under the mechan for financial, technical and material assistance to States regard to aviation security, a follow-up technical evalua mission was conducted in Morocco. Amman and Casabl are also the sites of regional and sub-regional ICAO trai centres in the field of security.

I. World Health Organization

27. Close collaboration continued between LAS and World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Office for Eastern Mediterranean, in Alexandria, in particular, with Council of Arab Ministers of Health. The Regional Dire participated in all the regular meetings of that council. technical units in the Regional Office also participated in numerous technical meetings organized by the Execu

Council where different technical topics were discussed and several technical reports prepared.

28. The WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean is also actively involved in the project on family and community health. The Pan-Arab Project for Child Development (PAPCHILD) was completed and the Pan Arab Project for Family Health (PAPFAM) has begun.

29. Close collaboration is ongoing with the Arab Labour Organization in the provision of technical support to develop a database on occupational diseases and work accidents in member States. Cooperation also continued with regard to the environmental impact of industrial activity and on air quality guidelines. Working relations are ongoing through the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment and two of its bodies: the Joint Committee of the Programme on Environmental Education, Information and Awareness in the Arab Countries and the Standing Committee on the Control of Industrial Pollution in the Arab Countries.

J. World Bank

30. Cooperation between the World Bank and LAS continued to be close and productive. In addition to participating in the periodic general meetings on cooperation between the specialized agencies of the United Nations system and LAS, the World Bank specifically cooperated with LAS in the following areas: provision of World Bank research papers and other reports and publications to LAS; periodic consultation between World Bank staff and LAS staff in the preparation work for the launching of the Arab Free Trade Zone initiative; continued collaboration between the World Bank and specialized agencies of LAS on important developmental and other sectoral issues; and participation by senior staff of LAS in a comprehensive course prepared by the World Bank on "Global integration and the new trade agenda", held in Washington in the summer of 1998.

K. Universal Postal Union

31. Cooperation with the Universal Postal Union (UPU) is coordinated by the Arab Permanent Postal Commission (APPC), the successor to the Arab Postal Union. APPC comprises all the postal administrations of member countries of LAS. As part of its presence in the field, UPU created, in 1991, the post of Regional Adviser responsible for the Arab countries, based in Cairo, with responsibility for cooperating with the Restricted Postal Unions, particularly on defining regional technical assistance programmes; helping administrations to take the necessary steps to obtain funding for postal projects; identifying options for the financing of postal projects through international/bilateral funding sources; and helping administrations to implement the Seoul postal strategy, which defines the major actions to be undertaken nationally and regionally.

32. UPU regularly participates in meetings of APPC. LAS and APPC are also invited to take part in the work of the permanent bodies of UPU. At its 1995 meeting, the UPU Council of Administration approved the regional technical assistance priorities for the Arab countries for the period from 1996 to 2000. The programmes and projects were developed and implemented in close cooperation with APPC. As part of the implementation of these programmes, UPU has organized several specialized group training activities for the postal administrations of Arab countries. Moreover, as part of its technical cooperation programme for the period from 1996 to 2000, UPU is currently implementing 12 multi-year integrated projects for Arab countries.

L. International Telecommunication Union

33. During the period under review, the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), through its Regional Office for the Arab States and Arab States Unit, maintained close cooperation with the Technical Secretariat of the Council of Arab Telecommunications Ministers of LAS. Apart from participating mutually in a number of meetings, task forces and seminars, ITU continues to cooperate with LAS in developing telecommunications in the Arab region and to coordinate its activities by reciprocal exchange of information.

M. United Nations Industrial Development Organization

34. The United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) actively cooperates with LAS specialized institutions, in particular the Arab Industrial Development and Mining Organization (AIDMO) and ALECSO.

35. Given the industrial mandate of both UNIDO and AIDMO, the bulk of regional activities deployed by UNIDO in the Arab countries is implemented in cooperation with AIDMO as a specialized organization of the League. The following activities have been developed and implemented:

preparatory activities (in cooperation with AIDMO) related to a training workshop on project preparation and appraisal, including the application of the Computer Model for Feasibility Analysis and Reporting (COMFAR) for selected Arab countries; project concepts prepared for the strengthening and capacity-building of AIDMO and the UNIDO Technological Information Exchange System (TIES); preparation of a project document on a "Networking programme for the Arab region, preparatory assistance in the establishment of effective national information networks and a regional Arab Business Network".

36. There was also an exchange of correspondence between UNIDO and LAS to review ways and means of promoting cooperation in environmental issues.

N. International Atomic Energy Agency

37. Most technical cooperation activities are carried out through national projects. There are, however also regional projects and activities in which member States in western Asia participate. Currently, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) is jointly organizing, with the Arab Organization for Agricultural Development (AOAD), a training course in Malaysia.

38. A regional basic professional training course on radiation, to be held in Damascus in the last quarter of 1999, is being organized in collaboration with the Arab Atomic Energy Agency.

IV. General meeting on cooperation between organizations of the United Nations system and the League of Arab States

39. As recommended by the General Assembly in its resolution 53/8, the general meeting on cooperation between the representatives of the secretariats of the United Nations system and the League of Arab States and its specialized organizations took place at Vienna, from 7 to 9 July 1999.

40. Representatives of the following bodies of the United Nations system and the League of Arab States participated in the meeting:

(a) United Nations system. Centre for International Crime Prevention, Department of Disarmament Affairs, Department of Political Affairs, Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), International Monetary Fund (IMF), United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat), United Nations International Drug Control Programme (UNDCP), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), World Health Organization (WHO), World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and the World Bank.

(b) League of Arab States. League of Arab States secretariat, Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (ALECSO), Arab Administrative Development Organization (ARADO), Arab Civil Aviation Commission (ACAC), Arab Industrial Development and Mining Organization (AIDMO), Arab Organization for Agricultural Development (AOAD), Arab Labour Organization (ALO), Arab Academy for Science and Technology (AAST), Arab Authority for Agricultural Investment and Development (AAAID), Arab Atomic Energy Agency (AAEA), Arab Centre for the Study of Arid Zones and Dry Lands (ACSAD), Arab Bank for Economic Development in Africa and the Council of Arab Ministers of the Interior.

41. The Meeting was co-chaired by the Director, Deputy to the Chef de Cabinet of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, and the Under Secretary-General for International Political Affairs of the League of Arab States. They represented the respective Secretaries-General of the two organizations. The meeting assessed the cooperation between the United Nations system and the League of Arab States and its specialized organizations in the political, economic, social, humanitarian, cultural and administrative fields as outlined in General Assembly resolution 53/8. Both organizations expressed the determination to further strengthen the existing cooperation.

42. The United Nations and LAS expressed their conviction that the welfare and prosperity of all nations of the world could only be achieved through the establishment and maintenance of peace and security in a world where many regions were plagued with turmoil, conflicts and civil and ethnic strife. Recognizing that the world was stepping into the twenty-first century with the burden of many unresolved conflicts and stalemated peace processes, the meeting stressed that those conflicts posed a threat to peace and drained the scarce resources of the world, which were urgently required for the development and prosperity of the human race.

43. Within the context of the maintenance of international peace and security, a number of regional issues were discussed, including those relating to the Middle East, Iraq and the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya. Satisfaction was expressed with regard to the active cooperation between the United Nations and LAS regarding the situation in the Comoros and in the coordination of international and regional efforts to assist the Somali people in their search for peace.

44. Stressing the importance of tackling issues of mutual concern, the meeting realized the need to further and enhance the scope of their cooperation. It stressed the deep commitment of both the United Nations and LAS to pursuing conflict prevention as an effective means for the removal of threats to peace and that the process of preventing conflicts and disputes from escalating and crossing the threshold of violence into armed conflicts required, *inter alia*, the collective efforts and coordination of international and regional organizations in the areas of monitoring, early detection and warning of volatile situations that represented potential armed conflicts.

45. The United Nations and LAS, drawing on lessons learned from past experiences, stressed their belief that the cessation of violence did not necessarily provide real peace or ensure security. In order to build a firm foundation for real and enduring peace and security, it was essential to eliminate the root causes of conflict, be they of a political, ethnic, economic, social or other nature. Only then would it be possible to ease suffering, preserve dignity and provide justice for all.

46. The meeting took note of the ongoing efforts by the Secretary General of the League of Arab States to establish an "Arab Court of Justice" and to create a "Mechanism for conflict resolution through peaceful means" in the Arab world.

47. The meeting also acknowledged that, although the international community was committed to the concept of conflict prevention, there was not enough emphasis on the whole range of preventive action, that is, preventive diplomacy, preventive humanitarian action and preventive peace-building. With the focus on peacekeeping and conflict resolution, vast resources were directed towards efforts to resolve existing armed conflicts after they erupted, when it was already too late for many of the victims. Therefore, both organizations felt the need to enhance cooperation in the areas of conflict prevention and peace-building and to elaborate and develop mechanisms based on the 13 modalities that were proposed by the third high-level meeting on cooperation between the United Nations and the regional organizations convened by the Secretary-General of the United Nations on 28 and 29 July 1998.

48. The meeting also reviewed existing modalities of cooperation between the two political departments and noted with satisfaction the mechanisms and channels of communication that were established since the last general meeting in 1997. The existing mechanisms included focal points, information exchanges and consultations at policy and operational levels. It was also noted in that regard that focal points could be responsible for following-up on the implementation of any joint programmes, conducting direct informal contacts on activities and issues of common interest, investigating and exploring possibilities and means of exchanging information, consultations concerning early signs of potential crises and conflicts and holding periodic consultative meetings between staff at the working level to exchange views. The meeting saw merit in exploring the possibility of assisting LAS with its efforts at capacity-building in areas of disarmament, conflict prevention and dispute settlement.

49. The meeting stressed the importance of the role of regional efforts towards disarmament and noted that regional instability and insecurity were major causes for arms proliferation and arms races. The meeting confirmed that the initiatives of regional parties to establish nuclear-weapon-free zones were important contributions to non-proliferation, disarmament and international peace and security. The meeting recalled the consensus reached in the General Assembly since its thirty-fifth session that the establishment of a nuclear-weapon free zone in the Middle East would greatly enhance international peace and security. For these reasons, the meeting acknowledged with satisfaction the progress made by LAS and its member States in elaborating a draft treaty. The meeting noted that the credibility of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons was being called into question owing to the inability of the international community to guarantee universal adherence to it. It was further shaken by the decision of two non-signatories to conduct underground testing.

50. The meeting reiterated its concern that landmines were spreading in spite of the increasing efforts of the international community during the past few years. The United Nations and LAS stressed the multidimensional nature of the landmines problem with its humanitarian, economic, political and environmental ramifications, which posed major obstacles to the development of mine-infested countries, not to mention the devastating loss of thousands of lives. International assistance to deal with this problem was urgently needed. Stressing the importance of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling,

Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction, and expressing satisfaction over the growing number of countries acceding to the treaty, the meeting acknowledged the need to take the views and reservations expressed by many non-signatory States into serious consideration, in order to encourage them to become signatories to the treaty as a step towards its universal ratification. Within the aforementioned framework, the United Nations and LAS agreed to investigate prospects and possibilities of assisting LAS.

51. Having undertaken a thorough review of the progress achieved since the 1997 meeting at Geneva, the agencies and programmes of the United Nations system and LAS and its institutions agreed to further consolidate and strengthen cooperation in the following areas: environment; agricultural and rural development; industry; energy; transport; telecommunications; human settlements; trade; labour, employment and human resources; social development; population, health and reproductive health; education, culture and science; drug control and crime prevention; refugees; and information and technology.

52. In accordance with the decision of the General Assembly that inter-agency sectoral meetings should be organized regularly on areas of priority and wide importance in the development of Arab States, the United Nations and LAS agreed that the next sectoral meeting would be held at the headquarters of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia in Beirut in the year 2000 on the subject of youth and employment. LAS also proposed that another meeting be held in 2000 on cooperation challenges presented by the advent of the third millennium.

53. The items on the agenda of the general meeting were considered by working groups composed of representatives of the departments, organizations and agencies concerned. Proposals and recommendations emanating from the discussions, as well as those contained in the working papers, were incorporated in the final document adopted by the general meeting at its closing session. The final document was transmitted by the Secretariat to all the participating agencies and organizations of the United Nations system and to the General Secretariat of the League of Arab States in July 1999.